

Samuel Moody

Mr. Chandler's
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT
NEWBURY-PORT,

June 25, 1867.

REPORT

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Aldine Collection

DIV.

Ministers of the Gospel, Gifts of the LORD to
his Churches ; and to be obtained by Prayer.

A
S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

A T

NEWBURY-PORT,

JUNE 25, 1767.

A FAST, sanctified by the Congregational-
Church and Society there, under Bereavement
of their Pastor.

The Unitarian Society

(Published at the Desire of many of said Society.)

By JAMES CHANDLER, A.M.

Pastor of the West Church in Rowley.

I will give you Pastors according to mine Heart, which shall
feed you with Knowledge and with Understanding.

JER. 3. 15.

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the Harvest, that he will
send forth Laborers into his Harvest.

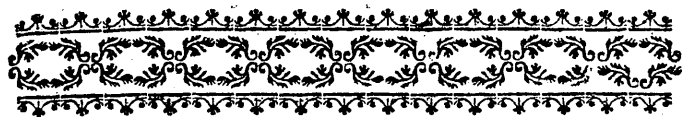
MAT. 9. 38.

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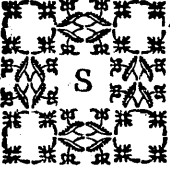


Ministers of the Gospel Gifts of the LORD to his Churches, &c.



Epistle to PHILEMON 22 ver.

*—I trust that through your Prayers I
shall be given unto you.*

 **S**AINTE Paul, who wrote these words to Philemon, and to the church which was in his house, was a minister—an apostle of Jesus Christ, who if he were given to them, would have come to them, in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. This being attended to, the word of God which I have now read to you leads us to observe,

That ministers of the gospel are gifts which the LORD gives to his churches. And—That his people are to wait on him in all the ways which he prescribes to them, particularly, by prayer for these gifts.

Let it be observed, *in the first place*, that ministers of the gospel are gifts of the LORD to his church—to particular churches.

This

This observation will be illustrated, if we consider—the ministry of the word to be of divine institution—that such a ministry is a rich gift to the churches, and then, view the gift itself, take notice of the character of a good minister of Jesus Christ.

That a gospel-ministry is of divine institution, is firstly to be observed.

In all ages of the church, God has sent his servants to his people, to speak his words—to be his ambassadors to them. Under the old-testament, he appointed *Moses* and the *Prophets* to be master-builders, to *lay* the foundation; and for ordinary ministers. *Priests, whose lips were to keep knowledge, and the people were to seek the law at their mouths, they being the messengers of the Lord of Hosts^a.*

And that the gospel-day might come, *the sun of righteousness arose* unto the church. God raised up his son Jesus, *a prophet like unto Moses*, and greater than Moses. *whom we should hear in all things, whatsoever he saith unto us.^b* *The great salvation began to be spoken by the Lord^c.* And when he had finished his personal ministry on this earth, he commissioned his disciples to be his apostles, to *go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature^d*: He made them extraordinary ministers in his church: such as the then state of the church required. By the ministry of the apostles and evangelists, we have the gospel—the new-testament, that sure word of our salvation.

And the Lord thought fit that there should be a ministry in his church, to the end of the world:

That

^a Mal. 2. 7. ^b Acts 3. 22. ^c Heb. 2. 3. ^d Mar. 16. 15.

Gifts of the Lord to his Churches, &c. 7

That elders should be ordained in every church*. When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men : gave some, apostles : and some, prophets : and some, evangelists : and some, pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. There is, moreover, the word of the Lord to his ministers, directing and encouraging them in their work : And his word to his people, bidding them to know them who are over them in the Lord, and admonish them ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Thus, it is evident that a gospel ministry is an institution of the Lord.

2. This ministry is a free and rich gift of God to his church.

Ministers of the gospel are the Lord's ambassadors, bound, by all bonds, to be faithful to his cause and kingdom, to persuade men to give unto God, the things which are God's. At the same time, they are the Lord's messengers of peace and salvation to men : The Lord sends them ^a to shew unto their brethren the way of salvation. 'Tis of his love and grace that he does this : Such a ministry is a rich gift of his to his churches. This may appear in a clear light, if we consider—The need Christ's sheep are in of a gospel-ministry—and what the end and design of this gift is, what is, through divine grace, the fruit of a good ministry. Observe then,

1. The need Christ's sheep have of a gospel ministry. When he came into this world, he said—He was come to seek and to save that which

* Tit. 1. 5. † Eph. 4 Ch. ‡ Thel. 5. 12, 13. ^a Acts 16. 17.

is *lost*¹. In these words he gives a description of fallen man. We are *lost*: are *sinners without strength*: Not only lay under a great load of guilt, which we have no righteousness of our own to remove; but our minds are blind, and all the faculties of our souls viciated: We are even *dead in trespasses and sins*^k. Wherefore, though God has provided a way of salvation for sinners of mankind, yet the door of this salvation must be opened to them, by the preaching of the gospel. For, (as the apostle Paul argues, *Rom. 10. 14.*) *How shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?* We may see the force of this arguing, by viewing the heathens, who never heard of a Saviour—are without Christ in the world; and are worshippers of dumb idols, *are taken captive by the devil at his will*. And what if the word of God had never been ministered to us, by Moses and the prophets, by Christ and his apostles?—We also had then been *without God, and without Christ in the world*, and consequently, *without hope*. And in a land of light, where we have bibles, how much do we need a good minister of Jesus Christ, to preach the gospel to us? There are, without doubt, in all our congregations, unregenerate sinners,—sinners that must *repent or perish*^l—must be *born again*, or they cannot see the kingdom of God^m: Some of them are hardened, secure sinners: Some are pure in their own eyes, though they

¹ Luke 19. 10.^k Eph. 2. begin.^l Luke 13. Ch.^m Joh. 3. 3. & 5.

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they are not washed from their filthiness. And some of them, it may be, are despairing, and murmuring, as if there was no door of salvation open to them. These are all of them in danger of missing the narrow way to life, even though they should be awaked to some concern about their own salvation ; especially in this day, when there is so much false religion.

These sinners want a good gospel ministry : and such a ministry is instituted for their conversion and salvation.

And real christians have a warfare—a race to run, in which they will have need of the best means to help them. They slumber, wander from the Lord ; are buffeted, tempted, and sometimes are weak and ready to faint : They know not what to do, and want the ministry of the word to wake them, to reduce, to guide, to sanctify, and to comfort them.

However light any make of the gospel ministry, when they are in health and prosperity, yet, in a trying hour, particularly in their spiritual troubles, men will feel their need of a good minister of Jesus Christ, to *comfort them with the consolations of God.*

The consideration of our need of the ministry of the word, leads us to acknowledge such a ministry to be a rich gift of God. One way of estimating a gift, is by the need we stand in of it—the piteous case we must have remained in, if the gift had not been given to us. And this consideration leads us to observe further, that we are unworthy of a gospel-ministry : Tis sin that makes it so much needed ; and that sin deserves

God's wrath. When therefore our piteous case is the case of guilty sinners, it is free grace in God to send to us ambassadors with words of peace and reconciliation: Herein it appears that God's *thoughts and ways are above ours, as heaven is higher than the earth.*

That we may the more clearly discern the richness of God's gift of a gospel-ministry, we may observe,

2. *The end of this ministry; and what the fruit and effect of a good ministry is, through God's grace.*

We are told for what end ministers are sent to preach the word to sinners; even, *to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith which is in Jesus Christ.* Acts 26. 18.

And to real christians ministers are sent to be *helpers of their joy*^a. The Lord bids them *feed his sheep and his lambs*^o—feed them *with knowledge and understanding*—give to every one *his portion of the word, in due season*^p. He bids them *preach the word*—that word of God, by which, *of his own will, he begets his elect*^q. In short, they are appointed to be *workers together with God*^r, instruments in the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the saints.

Is it not a rich gift of God to his churches, to send his ministers to them for this end?

And that this is the *design* of the gospel-ministry, observe the *fruit and effect* of it.

Though

^a 2 Cor. 1. 24.

^o John 21 Chap.

^p Luke 12. 42. &c.

^q 2 Tim. 4. 2. James 1. 18.

^r 2 Cor. 6. init.

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Though ministers have no self-sufficiency to convert men, and to build them up in faith, yet when they *plant and water*, God, of his grace *giveth the increase* : He is wont to bless his word which they preach—to make it effectual to the elect for their salvation.

It must be granted, that good ministers of Jesus Christ have not that success—that measure of success which is to be desired : It is to be lamented, that there are hypocrites, many hardened sinners, under a good ministry. But to others they are *the savor of life unto life*^s, instruments of their conversion and salvation ; the spirit of God making the preaching of the word thus effectual. There is a foundation for this conclusion—that faithful ministers of the gospel are instrumental in winning souls to Christ, and in the edification of saints : Under such a ministry sons and daughters are born to God, and *the first-born of the poor feed*, churches walk in the faith and order of the gospel. Whereas, were it not for the ministry of the gospel, it is likely that even the form of religion would soon be lost.—Thus christians are led to prize the ministry of the word as a rich gift of their ascended Lord.

We may see this point further illustrated when,

3. In the third place we *take a view of this gift* of the Lord to his church—*attend to the character* of a minister of Jesus Christ.

The churches must do this, both that they may know whom to regard as messengers of the Lord to them, and that they may duly esteem this gift of their Lord. This treasure is *in earthen vessels*.

Ministers of the gospel are men—*men of like passions* with their brethren. Yet they are men whom God qualifies for the office, in such a measure, that their ministry tends to answer the end for which they are given.—We may see something of their character in the particulars that now follow.

1. A minister of the gospel is *visibly, a true disciple of Christ*.

What king will trust *that* man as *his* ambassador to negotiate his most weighty matters, *whom* he knows to be his enemy, not cordial to his interest?—But what saith the scripture in this case?—Our Lord asked Peter saying—*Simon son of Jonas lovest thou me more than these?* And upon his answering in the affirmative, he said to him—*feed my sheep—feed my lambs*¹. And the apostle Paul wrote that *a bishop should be blameless—a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate*², that he should be *an example to the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*³. Here seems to be the character or description of a man who *loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*. I may add, that doing the work of the ministry, requires the exercise of grace. A minister of the gospel should therefore be a man enriched with the grace of God.—But how shall the churches know that a man is a saint?—Not by any of those marks which enthusiasm has invented; and which have sometimes been in vogue with some people. But by a profession of christianity—a profession of faith and repentance; and by a life and conversation agreeing with this profession,

¹ John 21: 15, 16, 17.

² Tit. 1. 2.

³ 1 Tim. 4. 12.

feſſion, and which gives credit to it. By *their fruits ye ſhall know them*.*

2. A miniſter of the goſpel muſt have *gifts* qualifying him to be a teacher of others.

A man's being a ſound believer don't make him a miniſter : That alone don't make him fit to be a miniſter of the word. No. The apoſtle Paul has twice † written, that a miniſter of the goſpel muſt be *apt to teach*. The work of the miniſtry is ſuch as makes this neceſſary, though a miniſter who is in the lower claſs as to gifts, may by diligence and fidelity in his work be uſeful.

It is very deſirable that a miniſter be a man of a learned education. There is need of this on ſeveral accounts. And they who ſpeak againſt it, may, almoſt as well, ſpeak againſt reaſon itſelf; for learning ſerves to open the underſtanding—to enlarge the mind : And they who decry learning as not needful, not uſeful, for a miniſter of the goſpel, have ſome deſign therein, not agreeing with truth and holineſs.—But it is not enough that a miniſter be a man of ingenuity and learning. It is too evident, that ſome ſuch men have erred from the truth, and employed their ſuperior talents to pervert the goſpel ; yea, even againſt revelation itſelf. Therefore,

3. A miniſter of the goſpel muſt be *ſound in the faith*—muſt know and preach *the truth as it is in Jeſus*.

'Tis by *ſound doctrine* that he muſt be able both to convince and exhort *gainſayers*‡ : He muſt preach *the word*—the word of God—that incor-

ruptible

* Matt. 7. 16. † 1 Tim. 3. 2. 2 Tim. 2. 24. ‡ Tit. 1. 9.

ruptible seed which liveth, and abideth for ever; and not the chaff of his own inventions.—But we may not hence conclude, that every good minister of Jesus Christ is exactly of the same opinion, and that they all speak the same things in lesser matters. No. Such ministers don't pretend to infallibility—to perfection in knowledge.

Their business is, *to build upon the foundation* which Christ and his apostles have laid, to preach the written word: And they humbly confess that *they know but in part, and prophesy but in part*; and they wait on the Lord for more perfect knowledge of the truth.

Yet there are *foundation-truths* of the gospel, in which, it may be expected that, all gospel-ministers will agree: Such as (to instance in two or three) *the fallen state of mankind*: Not only that we are all gone out of the way by actual transgressions of God's law, but that, as fallen in Adam^a, we are *natively dead in trespasses and sins*, so that we must *be born again, or we cannot see the kingdom of God*; born from above, for *the sons of God are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God^b*:—That being thus sinners, we are guilty before God, under his wrath and curse; and *that we cannot be justified in his sight by the deeds of the law*—for our own worthiness or works^c.—That tho' we are thus self-destroyed, yet *our help is in the Lord*: God has given his son Jesus Christ to be the redeemer of lost sinners. We must all *preach Christ, the way, the truth and the life*; *the only name under heaven, given among men, whereby*

we

^a Rom. 5. 12 Ch. ^b John 1. 13. ^c Rom. 3d Chap.

we must be saved^d—Preach Christ in his person, offices and benefits. It may be expected of all gospel-ministers, that they will preach *faith in Christ*, as that by which a man is so united to him, as to partake of his righteousness unto justification, and of his spirit to sanctification ~~by which~~: That they preach *repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ*: That they preach *the necessity of the effectual influences of the divine spirit* on the hearts of sinners, to begin, to carry on, and to perfect a work of grace in them; and *the encouragement* that is given them in the gospel, to cry to God for this work of his power and grace in them. *These* are some of the things included in *sound doctrine*. In short, all the ministers of the gospel may be expected to agree in preaching that doctrine which leads sinners to see their perishing need of a saviour, and which encourages them to *flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope which is set before them in the gospel*.

4. A minister of the gospel must be *called, and solemnly seperated to the sacred work*.

Previous to this, he is to be proved, that his visible christianity, his aptness to teach, and his soundness in the faith may be known to them who are concerned in his call. But to compleat his character, he must be called by, not imposed upon a people; and solemnly seperated to the work, *by fasting and prayer, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*^e.

They who are thus qualified, called, and ordained, are to be regarded as ministers of the gospel.

The

^d John 14. 6. Acts 4. 12.

^e Acts 2. 3. 1 Tim. 4. 14.

The Lord himself and not man thus qualifies his ministers for their work. *By his grace*, says the apostle Paul, *I am what I am*^{*}. The gifts of nature, providence, and grace, are all of them his gifts.

Moreover, by his gracious providence, he leads his people into the way of means to obtain the gift of a good minister; and of his love and grace he gives such gifts to his churches.

But he who giveth these gifts to his churches *will be enquired of by them to do it for them*. Therefore let us consider,

Secondly, That God's people are *to wait on him* in all the ways which he prescribes to them, particularly *by prayer*, for the good gifts of gospel-ministers.

I trust that through your prayers, I shall be given unto you, says the apostle, in my text. It is observable, throughout the sacred scripture, that though God's promises are free—*Are yea, and Amen in Christ Jesus, to his own glory and praise*, yet, he will have his people to seek to him—*Wait on him* in all the ways of his institution, for the promised mercy. Thus, when he promises, first *to give the new heart*, and then, to add temporal salvation; to do this *not for his people's worthiness, but for his own name's sake*, he saith, *I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them*.^{*} So God has promised *to give his people pastors according to his heart*, yet our Saviour says—*Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest*. And does not reason itself dictate thus much? For, are gospel-

ministers

^{*} 1 Cor. 15. 10.

^{*} Ezek. 36 Chap.

ministers God's gifts? Does he give gifts and grace to them, to qualify them for the work? Is it by his providence, that *this* minister is placed in this church, and *that* minister in that church? Then God's people who are in want of such a gift, are to acknowledge their dependence upon him for it; and to wait on him, particularly, by prayer, for this gift to be bestowed on them. *This*, I understand to be a part of our errand to the throne of grace to-day: And your sanctifying this fast, under your present circumstances, is agreeable to the revealed will of God. But christians must not content themselves with asking once, in the most solemn manner. They must seek 'till they find—'till God gives them the needed gift:—Seek it, in their families, and in their closets, as well as in public with the congregation of God's people.

Yea, when they have obtained the gift of a good minister, they should pray God to be with him, and to grant him grace sufficient for him. Their minister will be *that* to them which the Lord maketh him to be.—But let us not think to be heard merely for our much speaking. And we must watchfully avoid every thing that would hinder our prayers.

There are several things necessary to acceptable prayer. As,

1. It must be *the prayer of the upright*. If any one *draws near to God with his mouth, and honors him with his lips, while his heart is far from him*, he mocks God, and does not really wait on him for a blessing.

Such worship is *an abomination to the Lord*, and is not the prayer that he will *have respect to*, and graciously answer.

They who would *ask and receive*, must come to God penitently, come in uprightness, and ask needed mercy—mercy which they feel their need of, and in their prayers pour out the desire of their souls to God.

2. The prayer which God accepts, and will give a gracious answer to, must be *the prayer of faith*. *Without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to him, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him^h.*

When therefore we come to God for any of his good gifts, we should come, believing that he has the gift to bestow—believing his power and grace, and make our prayer to him, and trust in him for an answer of peace,—*not for our worthiness, but for his name's sake*, for the sake of Jesus Christ the mediator.

3. It should be *fervent prayer*. 'Tis *the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man that availeth muchⁱ*. And if people are sensible of their need of the mercy which they ask of God—sensible for instance, of their need of a good minister of Jesus Christ,—if they duly prize the gift, and realize that it is a gift of God which they can't hope to obtain, but of his grace; this will lead them to ask humbly—to cry mightily to him for it. And to encourage such prayer, God has said—he will *regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer^k*.

But

^h Heb. 11. 6.

ⁱ James 5. 16.

^k Psal. 102. 17.

But there is *something else* to be done by a people, beside their praying to God, to give them a good minister of the gospel, as they would hope to obtain this gift :

Something they must turn from and avoid, as they would not hinder their prayers.

1. More generally, they must see to this—— that they *turn from their sins unto God, in truth and with all their hearts.* If I regard iniquity in my heart (says David) *the Lord will not hear me.* 'Tis an awful consideration to be proposed to sinners : that tho' they come before God with his people,—come, in the most solemn way of fasting and prayer, and come to ask the most needed mercy ; yet, as they come and go away enemies of God, their prayer is not accepted.

Were this to be supposed the case with this congregation to day, this would then be *a day of provocation*, instead of a day of truly waiting on God. It is not to be supposed of the congregation ; however there may be reason to fear that it is true of some that present themselves here before the Lord, with his people.

2. A people that would, by prayer to God, obtain the gift of a good minister of the word, must particularly *beware of carnal ends* in seeking a man to be set over them. To some it is said—*Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts^m.* This is applicable to such, if any such there be, as ask of God the gift of a minister to strengthen *their* party, against another part of their fellow christians : 'tis applicable to such as desire a minister—to promote
C 2 their

¹ Psalm 66. 18.

^m James 4. 3.

their worldly glory—to be a credit to them as a polite and ingenious gentleman ; while they care not whether he preaches the gospel to them in its purity or not. They who would truly wait on God for the rich gift of gospel-minister must beware of such, and of all false ends, and must desire such a minister as the gospel describes ; and desire from the heart the benefit that such ministers are given to be instruments of to the people.

Thus, christians who are seeking to God for a minister of the gospel, are to look that there be no sin in them, to separate between their God and them, and to keep the good gift from them ; they should particularly beware of base sinister ends in seeking a minister.

And their duty is not all of it *negative*. There is something which they must be *active in*. As,

1. They *should unitedly rise up to wait on God for so rich a gift*. Ministers of the gospel are ministers to the whole flocks over which the holy ghost makes them overseers^a. All the people want a good minister of Jesus Christ. And when they are *as sheep without a shepherd*, they should, with one mind and heart, rise up to seek by prayer and all ways suitable to the end, a pastor after God's heart, and strengthen the hands of each other in this good work. He that will then *cause divisions*, and put blocks in the way, to hinder the society's obtaining a good gospel-minister, is unworthy to be numbred with the church or society which he claims the privilege of being a member of.—Only here observe, that *two cannot walk together except they be agreed :*

And

^a Acts 20. 28.

And so, it can't be expected that a society will agree in the choice of a minister, if they are not agreed in the doctrines—in the religion of the gospel. This is therefore what may be properly enquired into—whether they are *of one mind* with respect to religion itself, and the character of the man whom they would have to preach to them the religion of the gospel. And if they can't agree in this, they had better *part asunder*, than pretend to unite in that, in which they are so disunited°.

2. A people that want, and are united in their desire of a gospel-minister, are *to look out for, to seek such a gift of God*. Being destitute, it is their business to seek a supply. If they have knowledge of candidates who have the appearance of suitable ones for them, they may proceed to the trial of one or more of them, without enquiring of others. If they don't know any such candidates, it is fit they should enquire after them,

- This is not designed to encourage—to give the least countenance to, the separations which are now so common in this land. The author knows too much of the weakness and wickedness of some of them, to mean any such thing.

Neither is it meant to suppose, that there is occasion for such a disunion in this church, or to encourage it. But rather it was tho't, that the mention of the thing would be so alarming, as to persuade the christians here, to watch against strifes and divisions :—to give up every thing but their consciences—every thing but the truth and cause of the Lord, for the sake of peace and unity.

Yet when truth—necessary truth—proper means of conversion and edification, are what is contended for, this is too tender a case to be determined by a majority of votes, so as to bind the whole society. And he who is acquainted with the controversies that have been, and that do now subsist in some churches ; will, perhaps, think the Sermon unexceptionable in this point, where a society is capable of existing as two distinct societies.

them, minding well, of whom they enquire, and what information they get. And when they invite the man to preach to them as a probationer, they should *make a proper trial of him* :—Not take any man upon trust, as we say, not lay hands suddenly upon any man ; but be satisfied with respect to his qualifications for the ministry, before they call him to take the oversight of them, and submit themselves to him as their pastor. When they have thus proved him and are satisfied, 'tis their part, to *call him to office*, and to encourage his acceptance of their call, and thereupon *to see that he be separated to the service of the gospel* among them, according to divine institution.

I shall here only add—That having thus obtained of the Lord, the rich gift of a minister of the gospel, they are still to pray to God for him, are to *strengthen his hands and encourage his heart* in his work, all that they can : And it infinitely concerns them *to receive the word of God* which he ministers to them *into good and honest hearts, to be doers of it*.

What I have now further to do, is to *apply* what you have heard.

I shall do this, in an *address* to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the congregation of his people, who usually worship God in this house ; who are now a bereaved flock, in want of a minister of Jesus Christ, to break the bread of life unto them.

Brethren, your conduct in sanctifying this day as a fast, under your circumstance, is to be approved (as I have hinted before). The death of

a minister of the gospel admonishes a people of the occasion they have to humble themselves before God :—On this account, among others, because they have been no more thankful for, and fruitful under the means of grace which God has given them to enjoy. You have occasion, under this bereavement, to remember mercy, as well as judgment. Your late pastor^p, whom God gave to you, at your incorporation into a religious society, was continued to you, and assisted in the sacred work, a great while—more than forty years. A long life for a minister ! And yet his age was not so great, but, if the will of God had been so, he might have served you in the work of the ministry, for years to come. This should lead you to enquire—wherefore God so contendeth with you ; and to look—that such a dispensation of God's holy providence be not lost upon you.

And now, being as sheep without a shepherd, God is calling you to a work, *new* to most of you—A work of no little importance to you, to your children, and to the interest of religion among you : I mean, the calling and settling another gospel-minister. For, blessed be God ! tho' you are bereaved, the gospel is not taken away from you. And there is hope that you may obtain another good minister of Jesus Christ, to feed you and your children with the food of the word.

Pastors and teachers are gifts which the Lord bestows on his churches. And by his providence this land has yet some candidates of whom there is

^p The Rev. Mr. *John Lowell*, who departed this Life May 15th, in the 64th Year of his Age.

is hope that they will serve churches in the work of the ministry skilfully and faithfully. Such an one you want; and such it is your wisdom and duty to seek. And what you have now heard, may suggest to you some rules of procedure in this weighty matter.

It leads you to be *humble*, as those who need the gift, and are dependent on the sovereign pleasure—on the grace of God for it.

Some people, when they go about this work, may be supposed to be too self-confident: They seem to think they can have, almost, whom they will.—You have as much reason to think so, as most congregations have. And, without doubt you may obtain almost any one of those preachers who take the office for *filthy lucre*—who care more for their own living in the world, than they do for Christ's sheep. But you will do well to consider—that you are as dependent on the Lord for a *good* minister, as the least and poorest congregations are.

Let this thought then sink down into your hearts—That the gospel-minister which you want, is the Lord's gift—his free gift which you have no worthiness of—can't claim it of debt, nor buy it at a price.

Yet know,—You may know it from what you have now heard, that this very gift is what the great head of the church delights to give to his churches.

Therefore, pray to him for it. It is *through your prayers*—in answer to prayer, that you are to look and hope for this rich gift. Betake yourselves then to the Lord, as your refuge in your present want. And

Gifts of the Lord to his Churches, &c. 25

And that you may ask and receive, O look to this—that there be no sin to separate between God and you, and to keep the good gift from you. And in order to sincerity and fervency in your prayer to God for a good minister of Jesus Christ, think of *your need* of such a gift:—How you want to be instructed and quickened, and comforted in the way to heaven—want the food of the word, a portion of it in due season, in every case and condition—Think how dangerous it will be to you, to have a blind guide, a worldly-minded shepherd. And further consider, that after all that you can do yourselves, you may fail of a pastor after God's heart. And let such considerations persuade you to cry mightily to the Lord to undertake for you, to guide and succeed you in this affair.

You are also to behold with a believing eye *the free and rich Grace of God* in providing a way of salvation for lost man, and in sending his messengers to shew unto us the way of salvation, his express promise to give to his church pastors according to his heart. And hence let your prayer be the prayer of faith; hope in the mercy, the grace, and in the faithfulness of God, for the good gift of a gospel-minister. You may *all of you—all that fear God*, contribute, *this way*, towards the obtaining of a good minister: *The women*, who may not speak in the church, may yet, in their closets, speak to the Lord in prayer, begging of him, to set a man over this congregation, who shall break the bread of life unto them: *The youth* also, if there be any young ones in this place that love the Lord Jesus Christ,

may go to him and plead with him, how they want a spiritual guide, and beg of him, to give them one that shall be skilful and faithful.

God will not shut his ears against the prayer of them who call on him in truth. It will be a token for good to you, if you have a spirit of prayer poured upon you—if you are found wrestling with the Lord for a blessing.

And, O that you may be united in proper means to obtain the gift of a minister of the gospel ! Behold how good and how pleasant this unity will be ! And why should not all who have any serious thoughts of the christian religion be united in seeking the same gospel-minister ? Will not all of them desire to have the gospel preached to them in its purity and simplicity ? Will they not all desire a man to be set over them, who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity ? Unite then, my brethren, in seeking a good minister of Jesus Christ, and let not any party-zeal, any base end hinder your union.

You will not any of you be satisfied with a man for your minister, *merely* because he is a man of learning, an eloquent orator, a polite gentleman, and of a good family : For however desirable it may be to you, to have a man of all these qualities, yet, you know that they are not enough to make up the character of a minister of the gospel. You will therefore look that the man be also *sound in the faith*.—By soundness in the faith, I mean gospel-doctrine—the truth as it is in Jesus. And I may add—agreeableness in the main, with the confessions of the faith of protestant churches—those of them which are generally known among us.

us. For that these confessions are, *mainly*, and with some exceptions, forms of sound words, agreeing with the sacred scriptures, the most pious and learned divines of many ages have sufficiently proved: And you will have reason to refuse a candidate that laughs at them.

D 2

But

The occasion of such a testimony and warning is *this*—Our age produces a generation of men who like not the faith on which the protestant church was founded, and has stood hitherto. Some of them are men of powers, and draw away disciples after them.

But they have not been able yet, to obtain a general rejection of the religion of our *fathers*, and the setting up of their own scheme, in the room of it, in these churches. Yea, but few of them dare openly and directly to attempt it: But they are labouring for it *artfully* several ways.

One way is—by testifying against creeds, confessions of faith, and every thing of that sort:—pleading that they are set up in competition with, and as of, even more value than, the inspired scriptures. Whereas, they know that the church meaneth not so.—It is the doctrines confessed, and not merely the using of confessions, that their aim is against. There is this evidence of it—they some years ago sent abroad the assembly's catechism, which is in use among us, sheared and patched to make it agreeable to Dr. *Taylor's* scheme, with a preface recommending the use of catechisms, only adding that they must be according to truth; for which reason they had made the alteration. This catechism, like a wandering star, strangely appeared among us, and as strangely withdrew itself out of our sight.

Another of their artifices to get rid of the doctrines which the church has long tho't to be doctrines of the gospel—necessary articles of faith is—to represent them as matters of controversy, and so, of indifference in religion. And if they can find, in these confessions, or in any of the writings of the orthodox, an error or slip, they harp upon that string, as if they had gotten that which invalidates the whole.

Another device yet, which some of them have against the faith of these churches is—to throw out, at every opportunity, their flouts at our confessions of faith, and at the men who are zealous for orthodoxy: as if they meant to banter christians out of their religion. By these things they deceive unstable souls. And if we are always silent, they will grow bolder still, and be like to give religion the greater wound. That

But the scripture is the test to try all doctrines by—To the law and to the testimony: *If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*. Yet, you will not think it enough that a man says—he makes the scripture his rule; you will judge whether he preaches *the truth of scripture*—whether he *speaks as the oracles of God*.

'Tis your business to prove the man whom you may have your eye upon for a pastor. You have the liberty and privileges of a congregational-church, a free society; and are not to be dictated in the choice of a minister, by any man, or any society of men. I mention *this*, to plead from it, that it is your duty, as it is also your interest, to make proper trial of a candidate—a probationer for the sacred office among you: As you would be faithful to Christ, and settle one of *his* ministers among you, you must do it. Who should do it for you? Whom can you expect to be so officious as to go out of his sphere, and of his own accord make trial of your probationer? And as to a council that you may call to ordain the man, they will scarce have time to do it, as it should be done, on the day of ordination. The trial is therefore to be made by you. And in it, you should be faithful to the Lord, and consult the good of your selves, of each other, and of posterity.—In this trial, attend carefully to his *preaching*. He who *knows the truth*, and *receives*

That man is to be honored, who appears to have a spirit of piety himself, and to aim at the promotion of it in others, tho' his creed differs from established forms. But in some cases, the church needs warning—to be on their guard.

¹ Isaiah 8. 20.

² 1 Pet. 4. 11.

ceives it in the love of it, will preach it of his own accord. And no declaration of assent to the doctrines of the gospel--no confessions of faith, is to be accepted of that man whose preaching don't witness for him.

You are to observe, not only the matter, but the manner of his preaching---whether the apparent aim and tendency of it is, to teach and persuade men to live godly in Christ Jesus---whether it is a proper means to promote experimental and practical religion. The plainest preaching that serves to this end, is better than the finest speculations and reasonings where this is wanting.

I shall only add, Observe the man's conversation, and see if it is *as becometh the gospel*, such as *ministers grace to the hearer*^v: for you will want a minister out of the pulpit, as well as in it.

I might have gone on to say---That a people who are seeking a gospel-minister, should *prepare him a lodging*, as the apostle speaks in the^v verse of my text.---Make suitable provision for his support. *This* reason speaks for, and it is required of christians in the gospel.---But, considering your numbers and wealth---especially considering your liberal distribution to your late pastor, and your generous grant to his widow^x, there will be no need to point out your duty in this respect.

And now brethren, Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, continue instant in prayer, avoid every thing which hinders prayer, neglect nothing which the Lord requires as your part and duty, and be always ready to receive the engrafted word,

^v Eph. 4. 29. Col. 4. 6.

^x 100 Dollars yearly.

word, to be doers of it. Then you may hope in the Lord, that of his grace, he will accept your humiliation and prayer, and in his time give you a pastor according to his heart, whom he will make a rich blessing to you and to your children after you.

F I N I S.

